

Reviews

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Zachary Macaulay 1768–1838: the steadfast Scot in the British anti-slavery movement. By Iain Whyte. Pp. 263. ISBN: 978-1846316968. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press. 2011. £65.00.

'Send back the money!': the Free Church of Scotland and American slavery. By Iain Whyte. Pp. 175. ISBN: 978-0227173893. Cambridge: James Clarke & Co. 2012. £19.50.

In 2006 Iain Whyte published his ground-breaking volume, *Scotland and the abolition of black slavery, 1756-1838* (Edinburgh University Press). Following on from this, Dr Whyte has recently published two additional monographs which further illuminate the study of Scottish involvement with antislavery. The first being a biography of one of British abolitionism's most important figures, the second is an account of an ecclesiastical tragedy which undermined the cause of abolition within the United States. Dr Whyte's biography of Zachary Macaulay is a significant addition to the historiography of British antislavery if for no other reason than that evangelical involvement in the abolitionist movement has at times been ignored or explained in terms that can best be described as crudely reductionist. Hence the assumption has sometimes been made that the abolitionists were religious fanatics who lacked any real interest in genuine philanthropy (pp 243–4). Another problem with the historiography of antislavery is that the history of abolition has often been examined through the lens of famous individuals, such as William Wilberforce or Frederick Douglass. The value of

looking at those deemed to be lesser figures is that it can provide a more nuanced analysis which serves as a corrective to over-simplified generalisations. In light of these considerations, Dr Whyte's biography of Zachary Macaulay, a man whose reputation has been eclipsed by that of his son, the historian Thomas Babington Macaulay, is a welcome addition to the existing literature on British abolitionism

The basic objective of this biography is to provide an overview of the life of one who, though by no means a typical Scot, embodied the prevailing Scottish notion that chattel slavery was contrary to the good of humanity and to the Christian religion (the author has added the necessary caveats about Scottish involvement in the slave-trade). Although a less prominent figure in the antislavery movement, Macaulay was recognised by T. F. Buxton as 'the real leader of this cause – the Anti-slavery tutor of us all'.¹ Macaulay was, in fact, British abolitionism's premier researcher, whose ability to gather and distil information did so much to damage the proslavery cause through the *Anti-Slavery Reporter*. Other aspects of Macaulay's life, however, have not been neglected. These include his upbringing as the son of a Moderate Church of Scotland clergyman and his debauched youth in Glasgow. In relation to the question as to why Macaulay was forced to leave Glasgow and flee to Jamaica for fear of disgrace, the author speculates that he may have fathered an illegitimate child. This appears to be a plausible explanation. However, in light of his later evangelicalism, one would have thought that Macaulay would have corrected the scandal later in life. While he was in Jamaica he became a bookkeeper on a slave-plantation, making him a partaker in the oppression of the

¹ T. F. Buxton, *Memoirs of Sir Thomas Foxwell Buxton, Baronet. With selections from his correspondence*, ed. Charles Buxton (Philadelphia, 1849), 271.

slaves. Following on from this, the author considers the influence of Thomas Babington (his brother-in-law) upon Macaulay's conversion to the evangelical religion of the Clapham Sect and to antislavery. Dr Whyte argues persuasively that the evidence supports Babington's thesis that Macaulay's views on slavery changed subsequent to his return to England, rather than Macaulay's own opinion that he had latent antislavery views while still in the West Indies. Other interesting themes include Macaulay's time as the governor of Sierra Leone and his influence upon the secular University College London. Some of the details in relation to his courtship and marriage to Selina Mills, which are described as being as 'bizarre as romantic relationships in a Jane Austin novel' (p. 53), might not appear to be of wider significance. However, this, and the accounts of his relationships with other members of his family and other participants in the antislavery movement, is useful for giving us an insight into the private life of one who could be easily dismissed as austere.

On the whole, the author's analysis is sound and based on a judicious use of primary evidence. His labours in the Macaulay papers, housed in San Marino's Huntington Library, and in other archival collections, were no doubt of great value in this regard. Crucially, Dr Whyte avoids the temptation of the biographer to engage in either crude hagiography or intellectual iconoclasm. The author is critical of certain aspects of Macaulay's time in Sierra Leone, arguing that his shy loneliness sometimes led to reckless decisions and insensitive diplomacy. Perhaps more seriously, Dr Whyte argues that Macaulay's business interests were not always congruous with his antislavery philanthropy. For instance, the fact that Macaulay built a significant part of his fortune on catching slavers does not sit well with disinterested zeal for abolition. The same could also be said of his enthusiasm for importing sugar from India and Mauritius, especially from the latter

where a particularly cruel form of slave-labour existed. There are, however, a few judgments that the reviewer would question. The assertion that Macaulay's evangelical religious beliefs were 'tantalisingly open and almost liberal at times' (p. 4) is debatable owing to his hostility towards Methodists, the Haldanes, and the Presbyterian abolitionist Andrew Thomson - even downplaying the latter's role in promoting emancipation. Although some of these disputes may have emerged because of extra-theological factors, it does appear that Macaulay was convinced that Anglicanism was the best form of Christianity. While it may be true that Macaulay saw Thomas Chalmers as an antislavery colleague, it should be kept in mind that Chalmers's 1826 pamphlet on slavery advocates a gradualist approach to emancipation that was in keeping with his notions concerning the sacredness of property.² Hence Chalmers's later willingness to have fellowship with and accept money from slaveholding churches after the Disruption is not so surprising. It is interesting that the author highlights Macaulay's support for William Lloyd Garrison's rejection of the American Colonization Society, because Garrison was to later become one of Chalmers's biggest critics during the 'Send back the money controversy'. Opposition to this society also indicates that Macaulay detested 'the unchristian prejudice of colour' (p. 235), which rendered him the scorn of racist periodicals such as *John Bull*. Another fascinating question concerns Macaulay's national identity. In the inscription under his bust we are told that his birthplace was 'Inverary, N.B. [North Britain]'. Answering the question of whether Macaulay should be considered primarily as a North British or as a Scottish figure, is something that the reviewer would like to see probed further. Nevertheless, these are only minor

² Thomas Chalmers, *A few thoughts on the abolition of colonial slavery* (Glasgow, 1826), pp 5-6.

concerns. Iain Whyte's book can safely be described as the definitive biography of Zachary Macaulay, which is written in a manner that makes it accessible even to non-specialists and also significantly illuminates the broader context of the abolitionist crusade. It is hoped that this will encourage similar studies on other lesser known figures in the antislavery movement.

A monograph on the 'Send back the money' controversy (1844-7) between the Free Church of Scotland and zealous proponents of abolitionism has been long overdue. Although it has been examined in several scholarly publications, it is really quite remarkable that it has taken someone until 2012 to write a book-length history of one of the most significant and tragic events in nineteenth-century Scottish ecclesiastical history. Following the Disruption of the Church of Scotland in 1843, the Free Church needed to raise funds in order to build churches, manses and schools, fund missions, and support over 400 ministers. Notwithstanding the vast sums which the Free Church raised in the wake of the Disruption, it was feared that the rate of giving would abate after the initial excitement died down. As a result, the Free Church looked for support from the wider evangelical world and so a deputation was sent by the General Assembly to the United States of America. Little did they realise that the receipt of modest donations from American Presbyterians would subsequently embroil the Free Church in a storm of controversy. The main problem was that the Free Kirk was perceived to be having fellowship and receiving money from ecclesiastical communions that tolerated slaveholders, a move which many abolitionists regarded as tantamount to condoning the chattel system. Notwithstanding a ferocious campaign against the leadership of the Free Church, the abolitionists failed in achieving their objectives as fellowship was not broken with the proslavery churches nor was the money sent back to the United States.

Dr Whyte's book analyses a wide range of events within a very short space. These include the conduct of the Free Church deputation to America, noting the critical importance of the influence of Charles Hodge of Princeton upon William Cunningham. Subsequently, the author considers debates at various meetings of the General Assembly as to the propriety of the deputations' conduct; the equivocation of Thomas Chalmers in relation to the sinfulness of slaveholding and his correspondence with the Southern Presbyterian Thomas Smyth; the campaign of the American abolitionists (Frederick Douglass, Henry C. Wright, and William Lloyd Garrison) against the Free Church's policy; the damage which abolitionists such as Wright did to their own cause owing to their anti-Sabbatarianism and teetotalism; ballads and satirical poems produced during the controversy; the rise and demise of the Free Church Anti-Slavery Society; the accusations of lewd conduct against the Revd James Macbeth (who had been one of the society's supporters) and his subsequent exile from Scotland. Issues outside of Scotland, though significant for the broader context in which the 'Send back the money' controversy took place, have also been discussed. These include the attitude of the Belfast Anti-Slavery Society towards the Free Church, the Presbyterian Church in Ireland's firmer stance against slavery, and debates over fellowship with slaveholders at the formation of the Evangelical Alliance in 1846. One particularly welcome feature of the present volume is the author's recognition of the role played by the prominent Irish Presbyterian abolitionist, the Revd Isaac Nelson of Donegall Street. Nelson is very important, not only to the 'Send back the money' controversy and the Free Church Anti-Slavery Society, but also owing to his contribution to the abolitionist cause within the Evangelical Alliance, Irish Presbyterianism, and the Belfast Anti-Slavery Society.

In many ways '*Send back the money!*' reads like a moral history of the controversy, especially in relation to the comparisons between it and disputes among Reformed churches in the twentieth-century over fellowship with pro-apartheid churches (pp 150–3). In the reviewer's opinion, the main lesson to be learned from this study is that powerful antislavery rhetoric was virtually useless unless it was backed up by ecclesiastical censure against those who persisted in slaveholding. One would even suggest that the Reformed Presbyterians (Covenanters) maintained an abolitionist position partly owing to their belief in close communion, while other orthodox Presbyterian groups with looser terms of communion refused to excommunicate them.³ Other interesting problems addressed in the book include the recognition that Free Church figures such as George Lewis and James Macbeth believed that the American Voluntaries submitted to the civil magistrate in matters which were *in sacris* (including prohibiting slaves from reading the Bible). It was thus ironic that the Free Church should leave the Church of Scotland over Erastianism only to have fellowship with those who submitted to similar state interference in sacred matters (pp 23–4, 141). The author does an excellent job of exposing the inconsistency of Chalmers, the champion of the godly commonwealth, arguing that Christianity should not interfere in civil or political institutions in order to justify fellowship with slaveholders (pp 43, 54–6). Moreover, Robert S. Candlish and John Duncan's attempts to distinguish between humane slave-owners and those who treated slaves as chattels were specious. The chattel system not an aberration of cruel masters, but was an integral part of the legal status of

³ Daniel Ritchie, 'Radical orthodoxy: Irish Covenanters and American slavery, circa 1830–65', *Church History* 82.4 (2013), pp 812–47.

slaves (pp 65–6, 92, 141). On the other hand, Dr Whyte shows sufficient empathy with the Free Church leaders, noting the enormous strain they were under before and after the Disruption (p. 48). Even though Cunningham can be seen as the chief villain in the controversy, it should be remembered that his four-year-old son died shortly before his father's visit to America (pp 18–19). Keeping this in mind should spare the Disruption Worthies some of the condescension of posterity. Furthermore, Dr Whyte rightly observes that H. C. Wright was a liability to abolitionism, especially as he continually sought to link emancipation to causes which were logically distinct from it and also owing to his intemperate attacks on Free Church clerics (pp 64, 87–8). The author has also challenged Duncan Rice's claim that supporters of the Free Church Anti-Slavery Society from other denominations necessarily had grievances against the Free Kirk; this is not correct as Isaac Nelson was a firm supporter of the Disruption (p. 139).

Notwithstanding the author's obvious painstaking primary research, both in archival and printed sources, the reviewer must object to the editorial decision to restrict the number of references so drastically. This, combined with the decision to use endnotes, sometimes renders it difficult to find specific references to sources being utilised. In terms of matters of substance, the reviewer would question whether the Old-New School split between American Presbyterians in 1837 can be explained in terms of the New School's greater appreciation for Common Sense Philosophy, as Old School divines such as Charles Hodge were deeply indebted to Common Sense Realism (p. 18).⁴ The author perhaps downplays the symbolic importance of the Free Church not returning the American

⁴ W. A. Hoffecker, *Charles Hodge: the pride of Princeton* (Phillipsburg, N.J., 2011), p. 90; D. W. Bebbington, *The dominance of evangelicalism: the age of Spurgeon and Moody* (Leicester, 2005), p. 121.

donations (p. 82), as the decision to retain the money did lend weight to religious defences of slavery. Conversely, if they had sent back the money the Americans could have dismissed this as British prejudice. The claim that H. C. Wright was fundamentally opposed to the American Civil War (p. 84) probably needs to be clarified further, as Wright said some things which appeared to lend weight to the Northern war effort.⁵ The same is also true with respect to W. L. Garrison and the Civil War (p. 128), as he grew more appreciative of the Lincoln administration and the cause of the Federal government as the war progressed. Indeed, Richard Blackett points out in *Divided Hearts* that this upset some of Garrison's supporters who still favoured his earlier policy of dis-union.⁶ Aside from a few minor points of this nature, Iain Whyte has performed great service in providing us with an excellent and concise overview of the 'Send back the money' controversy. This book should be read with great interest by all historians of abolitionism in both the United Kingdom and the United States owing to the transatlantic nature of the disputes under review.

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⁵ See his letter in the *Liberator*, 15 Nov. 1861.

⁶ R. J. M. Blackett, *Divided hearts: Britain and the American Civil War* (Baton Rouge, 2001), p. 57.